
VA Consolidation Written Testimony

VA Consolidation Plan

Intercontinental Hotel, 9801 Carnegie Ave.

Amphitheatre A and B

August 12, 2003

9:00 a.m.

Opening Statements

The City of Cleveland would first like to thank Chairman Everett Alvarez, Jr. and the entire CARES the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Service (CARES) Commission of the Department of Veterans Affairs for the opportunity to address the consolidation of the Brecksville and Wade Park facilities. To care for the veterans of our nation is an honor that we, the City of Cleveland, are proud to support. Our goal is to help improve all available services and listen to the needs of all veterans throughout Northeast Ohio. I am proud to say that under my administration, the City of Cleveland has created its first Veterans Affairs Committee. With this committee, I am able to hear the voice of local veterans and respond to their concerns quickly, accurately and efficiently.

The necessity to renovate the Brecksville campus has been well recognized. In past reviews, the Department of Veteran Affairs has acknowledged that the renovation of the Brecksville campus is a national priority. These studies have identified that the age and condition of the Brecksville campus impedes the efficient care of local veterans. We welcome the current review by the CARES Commission in hopes that it will enable us to partner with the VA to both enhance all services and create a more efficient system of care for local veterans.

The proposed consolidation of the Brecksville and Wade Park facilities will both increase the benefits to area veterans and provide the VA an opportunity to improve cost efficiency. With this proposal, every inpatient program or veteran service located at the current Brecksville campus will be available at the consolidated Wade Park campus. Not only will every existing service remain available but also the rehabilitative and inpatient programs can expand and serve a greater number of veterans. Currently, the Wade Park campus is one of the best VA medical centers in the nation. With their separate commitment to build both a navigation and data center, the Wade Park facility continues their dedication to provide improved healthcare to veterans. With both a consolidation and the expansion of the VA facilities, the Wade Park campus will provide accessibility to additional programming and improve the service to inpatient and outpatient veterans.

With Cleveland serving nearly 80,000 veterans a year, we realize the essential role we play in the care for not only the veterans of our city, but for the veterans of the surrounding community and beyond. As such, I, Mayor Jane L. Campbell, strongly support the consolidation of the Brecksville and Wade Park facilities at the Wade Park campus and I am joined in my support by the local community, United States Senators Mike Dewine and George Voinovich, Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones and City Council member Sabra Scott.

Improved Veteran Care

Through the consolidation of the Brecksville and Cleveland units, the transfer of inpatient veterans needing medical attention will no longer be necessary. Currently, when inpatients of the Brecksville campus require medical attention, they must be transported via ambulance or helicopter to the Wade Park facility. This transportation of veterans can cause their anxiety levels to become significantly increased. With the consolidation of both inpatient and medical facilities, this unnecessary travel would be discontinued. In addition to being stressful, this transportation between units can cause delays in immediate medical attention. The consolidation of the Brecksville and Wade Park facilities will allow veterans to move from long term to urgent care units within moments and receive quicker, more efficient medical attention.

The completed consolidation of inpatient programs at the Wade Park unit will allow Cleveland to become the location of a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center. This rehabilitative center will provide veterans recovering from various illnesses improved access to vital rehabilitation facilities, including a new Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. Currently, visually impaired veterans from the local area can wait up to one year and must travel to Chicago, Illinois to receive treatment. This treatment would become readily available through this rehabilitative program and allow veterans to receive quicker, more efficient healthcare. This consolidation offers an exciting opportunity to improve the care of veterans throughout the Greater Cleveland area.

The Wade Park facility is located in a community that has a much larger number of veterans than does the Brecksville campus. Within the past year, over 4,000 veterans who visited the Wade Park facility had residency within a two-mile radius. Within the same distance, the Brecksville facility had 635 veterans with residency and close to 400 of these participated in the inpatient programs. With the Wade Park facility servicing a large number of patients who reside in the local community, a consolidation of services will allow the VA to provide veterans greater access to their doctors, counselors and additional rehabilitative services.

The Louis Stokes Medical Center is located within minutes of several nationally acclaimed medical facilities. The Cleveland Clinic Foundation,

University Hospitals of Cleveland and Case Western University School of Medicine are located within of the Wade Park campus. Since 1994, these medical facilities have invested over \$2 billion dollars to enhance the care of patients from around the world. As one of the most prestigious medical schools in the country, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine has many talented physicians that would have the opportunity to join the VA staff. Currently, the Wade Park facility is organizing a recruitment program to attract talented physicians from the local area. With affiliations nearing 100 schools, the VA remains an active teaching site for individuals of various training programs. Increased co-op programs and employment opportunities will only enhance the probability that local students and physicians will join the VA staff. By nurturing increased local partnerships, developing additional innovative rehabilitative programs and by expanding state of the art inpatient care facilities, a consolidated VA will be poised to attract and maintain the emerging young talent of the surrounding community.

The Louis Stokes Medical Center offers a wide range of excellent services to all veterans and VA personnel. Currently, the Wade Park unit offers more centers of clinical excellence and has one of the best surgical outcome rates of any VA in the nation. As the Wade Park campus continues to address veteran's needs, it has been able to maintain and expand its accreditations of essential clinical and educational programs. These programs include the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations and the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation facilities. With the consolidation of units, VA staff will have greater access to these key educational opportunities. With the mission to provide the most effective and efficient healthcare, these programs will continually teach VA staff how to improve the healthcare that veterans so richly deserve.

Located near University Circle, the Wade Park facility is surrounded by some of the nations greatest cultural and life-enhancing activities. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Severance Hall (home of the world renowned Cleveland Orchestra), and Rockefeller Park are each located within moments of the Louis Stokes Medical Center. Several ethnic restaurants and retail stores outline this surrounding area. From Mama Santos in Little Italy to Mi Pueblo on Euclid Avenue, the location of the Wade Park campus provides both inpatient and outpatient veterans and their families an opportunity to enjoy the many cultural attractions located throughout the University Circle area.

Commitment of Surrounding Community

The proposal to consolidate inpatient programs at the Wade Park facility coincides with the restoration of this historical neighborhood by both local developers and the City of Cleveland. The proposed inpatient programs and rehabilitative facilities will involve the construction of over 500,000 square feet

and the renovation of an additional 100,000 square feet of space. With multiple redevelopment projects occurring nearby, the completion of both the new VA facilities and local revitalization efforts will increase an already welcoming environment in which to visit. Through the combined efforts of the surrounding community, we have seen the diversity and historical value of homes surrounding the Wade Park campus brought to life.

Located on the northeast side of East 105th and Wade Park Avenue, the Heritage Lane Project will renovate and bring recognition to this historical neighborhood. Through the partnership of the City of Cleveland and the Famicos Foundation, twelve duplexes have been acquired to renovate and starting this fall, each will begin their transformation into market-rate single-family homes. When completed, each will be priced close to \$300,000 and highlight the value of historical homes throughout the Wade Park neighborhood. The City of Cleveland has committed close to \$4.6 million for the Heritage Lane Project and we are greatly anticipating the completion of this project.

Moving north along East 105th, the Glenville Development Corporation is preparing for the Parkside Homes Project. This exciting development includes the construction of twenty-one upscale townhouses and the acquisition and renovation of nine current housing units. After this renovation is complete, these historical homes will become market rate single-family housing units. Located northwest of the Superior Avenue and East 105th corner, the Parkside Homes Project will provide swift access to the many activities located throughout the University Circle district.

Within a mile of the Wade Park facility, Northeast Neighborhood Development Corporation (NNDC) has completed both the Willow Rose and Forest Hills Quality Projects. With the recently completed construction of forty new market rate single-family housing units, the energy and excitement of revitalization abounds throughout the local community. With NNDC anticipating the completion of an additional twenty-five single-family housing units, the area surrounding the Wade Park facility will continue to provide residents with a variety of newly constructed housing units.

The City of Cleveland is committed to addressing any concerns of either nearby residents or the visitors to the Wade Park campus. As a Cabinet level initiative, I have directed key members of my senior staff with the specific charge to facilitate the project and ensure that all necessary city resources and services are made available, well coordinated and to address the concerns of veterans using the Wade Park facility. Partnered with the Cleveland Police Department, the presence of the University Circle Police Advisory Board assures a safe, secure community in which veterans receive care at one of the finest VA medical centers in the country. We are actively preparing for the change in traffic patterns and the need to improve infrastructure surrounding the Wade Park facility. The

resurfacing of both Superior Avenue and East 105th (between Martin Luther King Boulevard and Superior Avenue) are scheduled to begin within the next few years. Discussions about rehabilitating both Stokes Boulevard and Carnegie Avenue have recently taken place. With these improvements, the City of Cleveland has prepared itself to take the leadership position for both the revitalization of the Wade Park neighborhood and a consolidated Wade Park facility. Travel into and from the Wade Park facility will remain simple, smooth and effortless.

Saves VA \$25 Million Each Year

The merging of the Brecksville and Louis Stokes Medical Center not only provides improved health care for veterans but also will allow the VA a savings of nearly \$25 million each year. These savings will take place through the consolidation of duplicated programs, less maintenance and renovation costs, and the ability to end the transportation of patients, staff and materiel between the two units. The possibility for both improved healthcare and cost savings offers an exciting opportunity to restructure the method in which veterans receive medical attention in the Greater Cleveland area.

With a consolidated Wade Park facility, the VA will combine any duplicated programs or activities at the current separate locations. Every current inpatient program at the Brecksville facility will continue to be available at the consolidated Wade Park unit. It is imperative that mental health programs such as the women's sexual trauma and compulsive gambling unit remain available to our local veterans. Not only will these current inpatient programs continue, but also with a consolidation, new, innovative health care programs will become available and allow Wade Park to provide for an even greater range of veteran needs.

With overall cost-effectiveness in mind, the design of a new expanded facility at Wade Park will greatly decrease the maintenance costs compared to that of two separate facilities. The \$5 million in costs to heat the Brecksville campus can now become available to improve veteran services. Not only will maintenance costs decrease but also \$27 million in scheduled projects can be avoided at the Brecksville campus within the next four years. These savings will take place without impairing the safety of either the Brecksville staff or its veterans. The merging of these facilities will allow the VA to operate more efficiently and continue to provide excellence in patient care, veterans' benefits and customer satisfaction.

One of the most cost-efficient actions that will occur through the consolidation of units will be the VA avoiding the expenses of transporting veterans, staff and materials between units. As stated earlier, inpatients located at the Brecksville campus requiring medical attention must travel via ambulance or helicopter to the Louis Stokes Medical Center. The transportation of veterans

needing common medical procedures can be both extremely stressful and becomes an inefficient use of crucial VA funds. On average, twenty-five patients are transferred each day. This travel costs the VA over \$4.5 million dollars each year. Without the need for inpatient transportation, funds can become available to provide both improved healthcare and increased rehabilitative programs for veterans. With the proposed consolidation, the costs of ambulance and helicopter transportation will be replaced with the calm, cost-free movement of veterans between inpatient facilities and the nationally acclaimed medical center.

Closing Statements

It is unusual that a plan to provide both improved services and the establishment of cost-effective measures is presented together. This is an unusual plan. The opportunity to provide improved services combined with cost-efficient actions is now. With the efforts of the VA through both the Louis Stokes Medical Center and the Brecksville campus, the veterans of Northeast Ohio have received some of the top medical attention in the nation. We will continue these efforts by improving both the current services available and anticipating the future needs of veterans. This consolidation will allow Cleveland to expand its services to over 100,000 veterans every year. With the opportunity to provide both improved veteran care while increasing cost-efficiency, I ask the CARES Commission for their strongest consideration of the Cleveland consolidation proposal. Partnered with the VA, we will continue our efforts in showing the same dedication to veterans that they have and continue to provide our country. They deserve nothing less.

Benefits of Consolidating the Brecksville and Wade Park Facilities

1. Improved health care for veterans.
2. Annual savings of \$25 million dollars for the VA.
3. Cleveland will become the location of a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center that includes a Rehabilitation Center for the Blind.
4. The transfer of inpatient veterans needing medical attention will no longer be necessary.
5. The Wade Park unit offers more centers of clinical excellence and has one of the best surgical outcome rates of any VA in the nation.
6. Over \$1 billion dollars has been invested by neighboring medical centers to enhance the care for patients from around the world.
7. At least 4,000 veterans live within two miles of the Wade Park facility. The Brecksville campus has 635 within similar distance.
8. Located near University Circle, the Wade Park facility is surrounded by some of the nations greatest cultural and life-enhancing activities.
9. Discontinuation of duplicated programs or activities at the current separate locations.
10. Will allow Cleveland to expand its services to reach over 100,000 veterans every year.